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RIYADH PLEASE PASS TO DHAHRAN, DEPARTMENT FOR BRIAN MCGRATH
IN NEA/ARP AND AL GOMBIS IN DRL/IRF

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/03/2028

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KIRF](#) [SA](#)

SUBJECT: ARREST/RELEASE OF CHRISTIAN INDIANS IN TAIF

Classified By: Classified by Acting Consul General CB Toney

11. (S) SUMMARY: On April 25, plain-clothed Saudis of unknown affiliation arrested 16 Christian Indians -- including women and children -- for conducting a worship service in the southwestern city of Taif. Police raided the worship location, locked-in everyone present, questioned them, and then transported them to local jails. For three days men remained in one jail while women and children remained in another for an additional day, with sparse food and little to no means of communication. On April 27, the police informed the men that they could call their sponsors to secure their release, and the following day, the women and children were also permitted to leave. The 16 Indians have returned to Taif but they, as well as the greater Christian Taif community, remain concerned about the arrest and are apprehensive about the possibility of subsequent raids. While the police did not confiscate religious materials or inform them that they had to discontinue practicing Christianity, they have become more cautious and now conduct services in smaller, gender-segregated groups. END SUMMARY

SAUDIS RAID APARTMENT, QUESTION INDIANS

12. (S) Mid-morning April 25 plain-clothed Saudis of unknown affiliation broke the door that led to the second-floor apartment in which the 16 Christian Indians were conducting worship service in Taif (3 hours by car from Jeddah). They entered the apartment, locked-in the Indians, and questioned them for 3 to 4 hours but did not confiscate anything, including the Bibles in plain site. After their release, ConGenOffs learned that the Saudis questioned them about the following: meeting membership, specifically whether Saudis or other nationalities attended, and on whether they offered religious classes. Additionally, they asked several questions about the musical instruments and donations box present as well as whether the apartment was a 'disco.'

POLICE ARREST INDIANS, ALLEGE MANY CHARGES

13. (S) After hours of questioning at the Taif apartment, the police transported and placed the 11 men in the "Faisaleya" jail and the 3 women and 2 children in the main Taif jail, where they remained for 3 to 4 days, respectively. A few of the victims shared that the Taif police had arrested them for establishing a church, dancing, and mixing of genders. (NOTE: The Office of the Governor must grant permission for all religious police raids. END NOTE). Those arrested all possessed Saudi national identity cards with Christianity stated as their religion.

MEN, AND WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN SEPARATE JAILS; DESCRIBE CONDITIONS

14. (S) Following their release, a few of the victims were

able to describe their jail conditions. The police grouped the 11 men together into one 5 foot by 10 foot cell with a hole as a urinal. They received small portions of food and purchased water from one of the foreign jail cleaners. The morning of April 26 police made two of the men clean other jail cells. They also stated that the police while laughing made two of the men briefly stand-up and sit down and hold their ears and bow down. (COMMENT: The police may have had them bow to mimic Muslim prayer; however, the Indians considered it "a punishment." END COMMENT.) Additionally, one of the men suffers from hypertension and did not have medication but was able to obtain it from the outside.

15. (S) The 3 women and 2 children were initially in three separate rooms but police then moved them to one larger, carpeted room. To share among them they received one plate of food for each meal. The mother of the two children repeatedly begged for additional food and milk, and subsequently, a Saudi female guard provided a bottle of milk. They added that a female police officer made two of the women strip nude and then stand-up and sit down a few times in quick succession. However, neither the men nor the women and children alleged significant physical mistreatment.

FOR INDIANS JAIL RELEASE WAS SPONTANEOUS

16. (S) On April 27, the men, some of who later shared their experience, stated that their release came as a surprise when around 3 o'clock police entered the cell and told them to call their sponsors to come and pick them up. A few hours later, the police returned their mobile phones and permitted them to call their sponsors. Not until the following day did the police release the women and children, which they said was due to having to wait for a specific officer to arrive to authorize their release. (NOTE: Prior to that day at least one sponsor had tried to secure the release of one of the Indians but was unable to do so. END NOTE.) However, upon their release, they said that the police never told them that they had to stop practicing Christianity.

COMMENT

17. (S) This is the first known raid of a Christian worship service in Saudi Arabia within at least a year. While the police can only conduct raids with the permission of the Governor, it is unclear who within Governor of Taif Fahad bin Mo'amar's office permitted the raid. In either case, this incident reveals a disparity between low-level and senior-level officials regarding the Kingdom's policy toward non-Muslims. King Abdullah has called for interfaith dialogue among Christians, Jews, and Muslims and undertook the first-ever meeting between a Pope, Pope Benedict XVI, and the Saudi monarch in November 2007. It is unclear whether this will remain an isolated event but given that the police neither confiscated the religious materials nor told the Christian Indians to discontinue worship, subsequent raids may be possible but not seem imminent or likely. END COMMENT

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